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HISTORY OF THE POST OFFICE
AND POSTMASTERS OF ...

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POSTMASTERS
OF
VINELAND, NEW JERSEY
1861 - 1933



By **FRANK D. ANDREWS**
Secretary Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society



One Hundred Copies Printed for the Author

VINELAND, NEW JERSEY
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Post Office and Postmasters of Vineland

BY FRANK D. ANDREWS

Although Southern New Jersey was early settled along the sea coast, the Delaware River and its tributaries, the interior, with the exception of a few small villages or towns, was practically a wilderness. In many cases large tracts of land were held by descendants of the original purchasers. One of these tracts containing over sixteen thousand acres, belonged to Richard Wood of Philadelphia. Mr. Wood held large interests in Millville and was instrumental in the extension of the railroad from Glassboro, already complete from Camden to the latter place.

The railroad for upward of six miles ran through Mr. Wood's property and made possible its development. This fact coming to the notice of Charles K. Landis, a young Philadelphian, associated with Mr. Byrnes in the development of the settlement of Hammonton, he saw an opportunity to establish a town upon certain principals and ideals he had long cherished. He sought an interview with Mr. Wood and secured a contract which gave him complete control.

It was on the 8th of August 1861 that Mr. Landis, with his surveyor and workmen, began the transformation of the wilderness into a model town. He applied for and was appointed Postmaster August 31, 1861. He advertised extensively, especially in the Eastern and Middle States, and was rewarded by an influx of visitors some of whom purchased farms and later returned with their families and household goods to begin the life of a pioneer.

During the winter of 1861-1862 Mr. Landis made his home and had his office at the house of Andrew Sharp, about one and a half miles from the center of the prospective town.

A path had been cleared through the woods and bushes for the accommodation of Mr. Landis and his workmen in a direct line somewhat shortening the distance. This was the first mail route, the bag containing letters and papers left by the cars being carried over the path to Mr. Landis' headquarters at the Sharp farm. Mr. Landis had in his employ a young man who had a girl "down East" and her weekly letter was, at first, the only addition to his employer's mail, which was rather meagre.

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On the completion of an hotel near the station, Mr. Landis moved his office into the front room on the second floor.

A Post Office, of which Mr. Landis was Postmaster, was first established at the Sharp farm, but during the summer of 1862 was opened in the hall of the hotel on the same floor with his office. H. M. Holbrook was assistant postmaster until succeeded by C. P. Morehouse who, although deaf was quick-witted, —only strangers were required to ask for their letters.

W. F. Bassett having opened a store in the rear of the hotel, the Post Office was removed in the summer of 1863 to that place, Mr. Bassett taking charge until he sold to William G. Smith. The rapid increase in Vineland's population correspondingly increased the business of the Post Office and additional help became necessary, therefore Mr. Smith sent for a relative in the West, Miss Libbie Robinson who had had experience in office work.

Miss Robinson, a young lady of pleasing personality and cheerful disposition, soon made many friends among the patrons of the Office which, under her efficient management, gave general satisfaction.

As Vineland continued to grow and prosper the demand for improved real estate became greater, as few of the newcomers cared to purchase wild land for farms which could only be had at some distance from the center of the town. Mr. Smith desirous of increasing his business opened a real estate office in his store, advertising improved property for sale.

As Mr. Landis through his extensive advertising had brought the people here, he felt that those who desired to sell their property through an agency should list it in his office. This prerogative was maintained for a few years, and although attempts were made to interfere with his business, a majority of the citizens sustained him in what he felt to be his rights, and not until some years later were other real estate offices established.

Mr. Smith, employed by Mr. Landis as assistant Postmaster, evidently did not consider that in loyalty to his employer he should not attempt to enter into competition with him.

Having bought the hotel in which his office was located, Mr. Landis erected a three story addition for the accommodation of visitors. The entrance to his office was on Landis Avenue, that of the hotel on the side street which was separated by a small park from East Boulevard.

Mr. Landis' agents met the incoming trains and escorted visitors and prospective purchasers to the hotel where, after an

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introduction to their chief or his clerk, they were shown maps and plans of Vineland, taken on a carriage ride over the tract to see such properties for sale as were listed in the office. Visitors entering the hotel could not fail to see Mr. Smith's sign a few yards away and were often led to investigate and possibly make their purchase through him. They were also obliged to call for their letters at the store which gave him an excellent opportunity to make their acquaintance and learn their wants in the real estate line. To prevent the loss of patronage which was likely to occur, Mr. Landis erected a two story building on the Avenue separated from his office by a wide hall, forming an attractive entrance to the hotel, the former entrance being closed. Dismissing Mr. Smith and making Miss Robinson assistant postmistress, Mr. Landis removed the Post Office to the new building which he had fitted up in modern style. This was in the fall of 1869 just before the writer and his mother arrived to spend the winter in Vineland, indeed we were among the last to enter before the side entrance was barred against admission. As we spent the winter at the hotel we soon became acquainted with the postmistress who boarded there, and other guests.

At that time there were but two trains each way daily, morning and afternoon. It would make an interesting picture were I able to present the reader with a view of Landis Avenue at this point some pleasant morning in the closing month of that year. As the time approached for the arrival of the train from Philadelphia, people might be seen coming from various directions for their morning's mail; some gather in little groups in front of the Post Office, others cross the street to the station. As the whistle of the train is heard Mr. Landis' agents hurry to the platform to meet any chance visitor who has come to see and perchance buy a farm or house.

As the idlers return from the station the little groups break up and enter the waiting room of the office while the mail is being sorted. More and more of the citizens enter, with here and there a stranger. It is not a quiet scene for man is a talking animal and it is difficult for him to keep silence when with his kind, also the small boy is in evidence and with a second of his species chase one another through the crowded room until some disgusted man puts them out. In the meantime Miss Robinson, an expert through long experience, and her assistant have been busy. How innocent those letters bearing Uncle Sam's postmark looked as the long letter box was unfastened and its contents dumped upon the table! George Washington's portrait on the upper right hand corner gave no indication of

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the message within. Messages which brought out all the emotions of which the human mind is capable, from undying love to enduring hate. Here may be found material for the novelist—all the vicissitudes of human life in these closely sealed missives of joy and sorrow.

Without much delay the window opens and the box holders and the waiting public press forward for their letters. If known to Miss Robinson, and few were not, the mail was quickly handed, or a disappointing negative given, before even a request for it had been made.

The excitement of the morning over, the people dispersed and quiet was again restored. Similar scenes were repeated with the arrival of the afternoon mail with some interesting variations, however. The young ladies were more in evidence, "waiting for the males" and by some strange coincidence, the young fellows were there also. What dates were made, what engagements followed that *chance* meeting in the Post Office, is not known, but I saw happy lovers meet, joy in their recognition, unmindful of the future and its possible disenchantment.

The early seventies found the Post Office like a well-oiled machine running smoothly and with little friction in its management. Although the depression following the era of prosperity after the Civil War affected the whole country, there was little change in the Office, where Charles H. Lyford was installed as clerk and assistant. Mr. Lyford was a native of New Hampshire born in Laconia in 1844. With his two brothers he had served in the Civil War, coming to Vineland where his parents had already settled, at the expiration of his term of service. He was familiar with clerical work, having been town clerk and was well qualified for his new position. With two such competent associates in charge, Mr. Landis, who had confidence in Miss Robinson's management, seldom visited the Office, and the public in general was apparently well satisfied.

After some years Mr. Landis' term of office expired and Mr. Lyford improved the opportunity for advancement and with the assistance of his brother, Col. Stephen C. Lyford of the Ordnance Department and then stationed in Washington, and influential friends, secured the appointment as Postmaster which was confirmed by the United States Senate February 29, 1876.

In the early settlement of Vineland the trend of business on Landis Avenue was westward of the railroad. A few years later the block between the Boulevard and Sixth Street, on the South side of the avenue, reserved, in part, for a vineyard, was

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divided into lots and substantial buildings with stores and offices erected. This in some measure changed the course of trade eastward and Sixth Street was more nearly the center of the population of the town plot.

Brown & Loughran, prosperous grocers, erected a three-story building during the summer of 1876 and on Nov. 6th of that year the Post Office was moved to that location. This new home of the Office was but a short distance from the corner of Sixth Street on the North side of the Avenue.

During the Centennial year of 1876, thousands of people visited Vineland, some to see the remarkable town carved from the wilderness in so few years, others, and this number was large, visiting the exhibition in Philadelphia improved the opportunity to see old friends and relations. The new hotel, the Baker House, was well patronized and of course the unusual influx of visitors added to the business of the Post Office. Its new location gave general satisfaction save to some of the "West Siders" whose daily walk was somewhat prolonged. Some person or persons unknown were more than pleased when they found a convenient entrance, after dark, and abstracted ten dollars in money and about fifty letters.

Working together for years in serving the public, Mr. Lyford found Miss Robinson a congenial companion and from respect and esteem, grew a more tender feeling which, it is said, led to an engagement to be followed by marriage as soon as his health would permit. However, this was not to be; Mr. Lyford's condition grew worse and although he struggled manfully to overcome disease the end came with the opening of the New Year of 1879.

Mr. Lyford's death brought sorrow to his many friends. To Miss Robinson, his passing caused unspoken suffering. It was, however, no time to nourish grief, the business of the Office must be carried on and she continued to perform its duties as heretofore. Friends rallied to her support and endeavored to secure for her the position now vacant. J. Porcius Gage was one of her most enthusiastic backers and a petition bearing one thousand signatures was presented, but although most certainly entitled to the appointment, a woman had no voice or vote in the affairs of the Nation: a man had, and his influence in this case resulted in the appointment of Seaman R. Fowler as Postmaster. Mr. Fowler, a native of New York City, was born April 21, 1821. He came to Vineland in 1867, purchased a farm on Main Road near Park Avenue and like many another person who came for the benefit of his health, he was greatly

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helped by an out of doors life. He had found farming, however, a rather strenuous life compared with his former occupation of hat manufacturer, therefore an opportunity to engage in the hotel business, for which he and his accomplished wife were eminently adapted, led to the purchase of the Baker House. Under their management the hotel became the temporary home of a desirable class of guests and the scene of many social gatherings. As one of the stores under the hotel was vacant Mr. Fowler occupied it as Post Office. With the removal came Miss Robinson, which pleased the patrons, who felt the former good service would be maintained. Mr. Fowler soon became familiar with the details of the office and for the next four years it remained in the east end of the building.

On July 1st, 1882, the rent of the Post Office boxes was increased from fifteen cents to twenty-five cents a quarter. This action of the government created great indignation on the part of the box holders. As there was no redress it had to be endured and the excitement it caused, subsided. Mr. Fowler's salary was \$1900, his store was occupied and of course he regretted to lose the office but he was succeeded by William J. Lippy, whose appointment was dated January 16, 1883.

Mr. Lippy was born in Troy, N. Y., March 27, 1838. He served in the Civil War for three years with the 10th Regt. Massachusetts Volunteers. At the expiration of the term of his enlistment he married and came to Vineland. He built the house on the north side of Landis Avenue west of Fourth St., where he resided until his death October 8, 1919. He was clerk of the township and held the office of collector before becoming Postmaster. He removed the Office from the Baker House to the west store of the Liberty Block on the north side of Landis Avenue between the Boulevard and Sixth Street. J. Leonard Welch was his deputy and the Misses Shelley, Miss Morse and Miss Lippy were clerks while he held office.

A change in the administration brought Grover Cleveland, a Democrat into the White House.

Dr. Charles Brewer, an active party worker, secured the appointment as Postmaster March 25, 1887.

Dr. Brewer was a native of Maryland, born in Annapolis, June 21, 1832. He received a liberal education and studied to be a physician. He enlisted in the Medical Corps of the U. S. Army August 29, 1856 as surgeon, and saw considerable service in the West. He resigned May 7th, 1861, to accept a similar position in the Confederate Army. Sometime after the close of the Civil War, broken in health, he came to Vineland where

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he conducted a drug store. He was deeply interested in the Episcopal Church and did much to reunite the dissenting parties. Dr. Brewer did something else that pleased both Republicans and Democrats alike. He sent for Miss Robinson who, for the past three years, had held a position in the Post Office of Tecumseh, Michigan. She was again installed in the office here, which gave general satisfaction to her Vineland friends.

Dr. Brewer was Postmaster during the last two years of President Cleveland's first term—1887-1889.

With the change of administration Benjamin Harrison, Republican, became president, March 4, 1889. A Republican Postmaster was now in order and Arthur T. Parsons received the appointment July 1, of that year. Mr. Parsons was a native of Rockport, Mass., where he was born in 1840. He served in the Civil War attaining the rank of captain. He came to Vineland about 1873 and bought a farm on Walnut Road. He was a member of the New Jersey Legislature in 1880-1883.

Thomas H. Hawkins, a prominent shoe manufacturer, erected a three-story brick building, the first floor designed for the Post Office, which was removed from Liberty Block to the new building opposite the Baker House. Miss Robinson was deputy and Miss Mabel Parsons and Miss Matilda Shelly clerks. Miss Lippy, also served in that capacity for a short time.

Mr. Parson was active and progressive, he believed the time had come for the introduction of the Free Delivery in Vineland. He found the Government willing to co-operate and accommodate the people. Twenty-six mail boxes were obtained and where possible attached to lamp posts. A window was opened in the Office known as the "Free Delivery" window where the last mail could be had by those who did not care to wait for the carrier in the morning.

From among the applicants for the position of carrier, Jesse Schoonmaker, Albert Keyser and W. B. Wood were appointed, but Mr. Wood having removed from town, George Boynton was chosen to fill his place.

On November 1, 1890, the Free Delivery system went into operation. Although the carriers were supposed to have familiarized themselves with their respected routes, it was quite another thing to start out in the early twilight with the last mail and find their way through the dimly lighted streets. The carriers were equipped with a small shaded lantern attached to their coats. On dark nights it was no easy task to find the way and deliver letters at houses whose occupants had retired and

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where all lights were extinguished, for it was sometimes eleven o'clock before, tired and weary, the carrier found his own home and rest.

On the longest routes one postman rode a horse, the other drove in a pony wagon but it soon became evident another carrier was needed and Mr. Harry T. Heaton was added to the force. Mr. Heaton soon found the work too strenuous and resigned to accept a position with Kimball & Prince. Thomas Bowman then took the place of Mr. Heaton.

Mr. Parsons died December 22, 1893 and Mr. W. H. Loppy took charge of the office until his successor was appointed.

The Democrats having elected Grover Cleveland to succeed Benjamin Harrison for a second term March 4, 1893, John M. Simpkins of that party, was appointed Postmaster March 14, 1894.

Mr. Simpkins was a native of New Jersey, born near Daretown, Jan. 12, 1847, and was an early settler in Vineland. He engaged in the meat and provision business. The Post Office continued in the Hawkins Building during his term of office. His salary was \$2300. Of the others, Miss Robinson received \$800, Mattie C. Shelly \$400, Mabel W. Parsons \$400.

The Free Delivery clerks in 1895 were as follows: Thomas P. Bowman, William M. Gutterson, Albert E. Keyser, Michael Monohan and Albert L. Williams, the two latter having taken the Civil Service examinations. Thomas J. Ware was mail messenger with a salary of \$96. Mr. Ware used to say that his name, and that of Vineland, being at the bottom of the alphabet, he did not receive his pay until the end of the month.

A. A. Sanderson had the contract for carrying the mails to the New Jersey Southern Station.

With the change of the administration, the Republican Party having elected William McKinley who was inaugurated March 4, 1897, came a change in Postmasters, John J. Hunt succeeding Mr. Simpkins. Mr. Hunt was a native of New York, born at Glenham, July 3, 1850. He came to Vineland in 1866, living upon a farm for a few years, then engaged in the flour and feed business. He was a member of the Borough Council and held other local offices. He was elected to the New Jersey Legislature from Cumberland County.

During his term of office the Post Office was removed from the Hawkins building to the north west corner of Landis Avenue and Sixth Street, the building then owned by Dr. O. H. Adams who at considerable expense had it fitted up for the purpose.

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When the office was later removed, he sold the fixtures for the Woodbine Post Office at a great loss.

Rural Free Delivery was established in Vineland while Mr. Hunt was Postmaster. Miner Spencer, Louis J. Shelly and Albert J. Nichols were appointed mail carriers December 1, 1900; William C. Walker January 1, 1901.

Mr. Hunt was succeeded by Frank Wanser during the second term of President McKinley's administration. Mr. Wanser, a native of New Jersey, was born at New Brunswick, Aug. 5, 1861. With his parents he came to Vineland in 1867. At the age of thirteen he was a page in the New Jersey Legislature and for the following two years in the Senate. With his father he engaged in the real estate and insurance business. He later served as bookkeeper in the Government Publication Department of the House of Representatives, Washington, D. C., during the Fifty-Fourth Congress.

Mr. Wanser was postmaster at Vineland from March 15, 1902 to July 15, 1910, when Walter Scott Brown was appointed in his place. Mr. Brown was born in Newlandburg, Pa. He held the office of Justice of Peace, was tax collector and Borough recorder. He was a man of literary ability and the author of two novels: "Andrew Bentley" and "The Rose of the Wilderness."

The Post Office was removed from the Adams building to the store made vacant by Tower and Schramm, who reopened their furniture store in the rear. Mr. Browne died February 1913 and, until his successor was appointed, Miss Rebecca Boody, assistant Postmaster, was in charge.

The Democrats having again obtained control, a Democratic post master was in order. Albert L. Williams was appointed by President Wilson, May 13, 1913. Mr. Williams was born in Millville, N. J., October 4, 1869. He became a resident of Vineland in 1884 and with his father carried on a foundry business. Mr. Williams was active in civic offices and a member of a number of local organizations. He was appointed by President Wilson for a second term and held his office until the Republican Party, through the election of Calvin Coolidge brought a change in postmasters, when Frank Wanser was again appointed. Mr. Wanser, at that time, held the office of State Inspector of Weights and Measures, and Mr. Williams continued to serve until Mr. Wanser was free to accept the postmastership. At the expiration of his term in 1925 he was reinstated and also in 1929 and will hold the office until 1934.

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In the continual growth of Vineland the quarters in the Tower building became inadequate for the increasing business of the office and efforts were made to obtain a government post office. The site of the old Presbyterian Church was purchased and in the Fall of 1925 the cornerstone of a permanent post office was laid. It was not, however, until November 1, 1926 that the new building, equipped with all the modern improvements, was opened to the public.

The building is of brick, 68 x 70 feet in size, and 24 feet in height; eight steps of six inch rise, lead to a lobby 24 x 32 feet about which are the various departments. The basement, 9½ feet in height, contains rooms for the convenience of the carriers and other purposes. This building is heated by steam and is fire-proof.

Today, the carrier delivers your mail to your home or place of business, or, if you choose, with your key you open your private box at the office.

71 ~~Sixty~~ years ago Mr. D. C. Gerow, the treasurer of the New York Tribune, one of the first purchasers of land in the prospective town of Vineland, asked the postmaster (Mr. Landis) for his mail. The postmaster looked in his hat, which served as post office and from it handed Mr. Gerow a letter.

Reader, behold what Time has wrought—once a wilderness, now a prosperous community!

The present personnel of the Vineland Office was obtained through the courtesy of Miss Rebecca Boody and is as follows:

POSTMASTER

Frank Wanser

SUBSTITUTE CLERKS

Rice, C. Edward
Vertolli, August

ASST. POSTMASTER

Rebecca N. Boody

CARRIERS

Adams, J. Milton
Barber, Ralph G.
Bennett, Herbert E.
Muth, William G.
Monahan, Michael F.
Newkirk, Andrew C.
Parker, Harry S.
Sharp, Herbert

CLERKS

Boody, Frank J.
Boody, Daniel H. Jr.
Crist, Martin J.
Down, Albert H.
Fowler, William H.
Heritage, Roy
Russell, Osborne M.
Williams, Christ Jr.

SUB. CARRIERS

Lezenby, John W.
Sertell, Daryl

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